



February 27, 2009

Busy committee cutoff week

Greetings friends and neighbors,

This is week seven of the 2009 legislative session, and **we've reached our first major milestone.** Wednesday was committee cutoff, which means it was the last day for bills to be given a public hearing and voted on by all but the [Transportation](#) and [Ways & Means](#) committees. The last day for those two committees will be Monday, March 2.

This has been the most hectic week I've had since taking office. We're voting bills out of committee, and I feel it is more important than ever that I research, read bills thoroughly and ask important questions so I can make informed votes. In addition, I occasionally have to put my priorities and beliefs aside and vote the way you have told me you want me to vote. It is difficult putting my signature in a "yea" or "nay" column because I know not everyone will agree with me, but **with each vote I know in my heart that I'm making the best choice for each situation** as it's been presented and representing the wishes of the people in the [Second District](#).

A typical day for me in Olympia lasts about 10 to 15 hours and I spend six to eight of those in committee hearing public testimony on bills. When I'm not in committee, I'm voting on bills in the Senate chamber, meeting with constituents or spending hours reading up on the issues on which I'll be voting. It's amazing how much energy it takes to make good, informed decisions, which is why I'm asking for you to be active in helping me make those decisions.

I need to know exactly how you feel about a particular bill or issue. Only then can I accurately represent your interests. Please don't hesitate to call or e-mail me with your thoughts and suggestions. I look forward to hearing from you soon!

CONTACT ME

E-MAIL:

becker.randi@leg.wa.gov

PHONE:

(360) 786-7602

TOLL-FREE:

(800) 562-6000

FAX:

(360) 786-7819

ADDRESS:

115B Irv Newhouse Bldg.
PO Box 40402
Olympia, WA 98504-0402

My agri-business bill



As you know, I've proposed a bill this session that will clarify language in current law that exempts certain agri-businesses from property taxes. Property owners who use their land for boarding horses, raising pigs, growing food or a number of other ag-related activities have worried that county governments, having discovered unclear language, would try to collect back taxes.

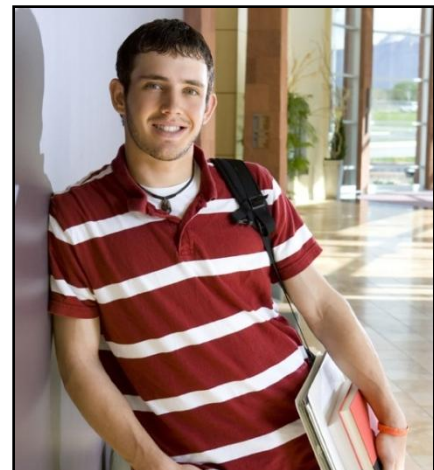
Senate Bill 5817 was unanimously voted out of the Agriculture & Rural Economic Development committee this week, which means it now goes to the Senate Ways & Means committee before it's considered by the full Senate. Although we still have some language in the bill that will need clarification, I'll be able to take care of that with a floor amendment once the bill is before the body. **I want to make sure that if the bill is eventually passed into law, there will be no doubt in anyone's mind as to the intent.** Leaving any unclear language in the bill before it is made law would open the door for auditors to interpret the law differently than intended. Then we'd be back to the situation that led to this bill being needed in the first place!

My bill will help people who qualify under the law by alleviating their fears that they might be held responsible for taxes they weren't supposed to pay in the first place. Business owners can continue working to provide for their families, their communities and helping stimulate our economy.

The good and the bad in health care

One of the more interesting bills we voted on in the Senate Health and Long-Term Care committee had to do with the issue of medical marijuana. The bill would give physician's assistants, ARNP's and naturopathic providers the ability to recommend **patient use of marijuana for medicinal purposes**. My brother had a bout with cancer several years ago and I believe he wouldn't have made it through as well as he did without it, so I'm interested in learning more about the potential benefits it can provide.

Another bill that I'm sorry to say didn't make it out of committee would have provided health care coverage to nearly 60,000 more people in Washington at no cost to taxpayers. **I was very disappointed that the committee chair chose not to have a vote on Senate Bill 5052,** which would have permitted insurance carriers to design a special coverage plan for young adults ages 19 to 34, who make up more than half of Washington's uninsured population. The bill also provided for options, such as if someone on the plan became pregnant, she could be moved onto a plan that covers pregnancy.



[SB 5052](#) would have given these young adults affordable insurance options. They would have had access to preventative health care, medications, doctor visits, and all at zero cost to the state. These plans would have taken a huge burden off hospital emergency rooms, and **I'm very disheartened that the committee didn't have the opportunity to vote on this very important bill.**

Making the most of Transportation

The Senate [Transportation](#) committee is one of the busiest committees on which I serve. We've been listening to testimony on bills concerning the Alaskan Way Viaduct, the state ferry system, vehicle impoundment, the licensing of kit cars, fuel taxes, tribal authority on tribal roads, commute trip reduction tax credits, children on motorcycles, regulating limousine and taxi drivers, and many others.

Transportation has by far the broadest number of issues of any of my committees. That's probably why the committee cutoff date for transportation is a few days beyond the cutoff date for most other committees. Cutoff for transportation is Monday, so we'll be hearing even more bills for the next several days.

Talk about it! On February 26th we heard testimony on [Senate Bill 5458](#), the proposed 2009 economic stimulus transportation funding act. Included in it at the state level is funding for the HOV lanes from the King County line to the Port of Tacoma. Pierce County is actually scheduled to get something!

I'm listening to you

Since I've been in office, many of you have been sending me e-mails with your concerns. Each week, I'm going to feature a few of your e-mails to let you know more about what your friends and neighbors are working on and interested in. For example, Nancy in Eatonville wrote to me on behalf of herself and her neighbors, saying they just wanted government out of their lives. Nancy said, *"We believe that government has been picking our pockets much too long, and we want their hand out of our pockets."*

Nancy, I know exactly how you feel, which is why **you need to be aware of what some in Olympia are planning to do.** If you and I are to believe what many in Olympia are saying, the state is now facing an estimated \$8.3 billion shortfall for the 2009-11 biennium. Some are suggesting tax increases are the only way to solve the problem. In fact, Democrat leadership in the House has said that **they intend on bringing a tax increase referendum to the voters** in June. That means instead of doing the right thing by reducing spending and cutting programs, they're going to ask you to tax yourselves to pay for basic services. They're saying that the budget mess they've created is impossible to solve, and that we can't balance the state budget without raising taxes. To that argument, I say, "Yes We Can!" **We can manage the problem without raising taxes.**

If government chose to spend the same amount next biennium as it's currently spending, most of that \$8 billion in debt would be erased instantly. **Projected state revenues are actually increasing,** albeit

slowly, which means that the amount of money the state takes in (assuming taxes are kept the same as they are now) will be more during the next biennium than this biennium.

In addition, we are in line to receive about \$3 billion from the federal government. After taking all that into account, the shortfall drops to a manageable \$1.5 billion (which could be lowered further using \$700 million the state has in reserves) and smart budgeting can easily erase that difference. **By prioritizing state spending, rethinking how we deliver government services and keeping the budget within available revenues**, the state can balance its budget without raising taxes. You can read more about it on our website, SenateRepublicans.wa.gov.

In closing...

If you'd like to share your concerns with me or ask me a question, please feel free to send me an e-mail to becker.randi@leg.wa.gov. You can also visit my legislative website at www.SenateRepublicans.wa.gov/Becker, where you'll find a link to my [sponsored bills](#) where you can keep track of what I'm doing. **And please consider forwarding this e-mail to anyone you think might be interested in receiving it. Ask them to contact me so I can add them to my distribution list.**

I look forward to your comments and suggestions on these issues or anything else coming before the Legislature. My office phone number is (360) 786-7602, or you can write me at 115B Irv Newhouse Building, Olympia, WA 98504. Thank you for allowing me the privilege of serving you in the Washington State Senate. It is truly an honor.

Sincerely,



Randi Becker
2nd District State Senator

